

Bunker Hill District
Bounded by Temple, Fifth, Hill and
Figueroa Streets
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CAL-344

HABS
CAL.
19-LOSAN
17.

PHOTOGRAPH
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

HABS
CAL
19-LOSAN
17

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CAL-344
Page 1

BUNKER HILL DISTRICT

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: Bounded by Temple, Fifth, Hill and Figueroa Streets

OWNER: Private ownership but to be acquired by Community
Redevelopment Agency.

USE: Dwellings

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Bunker Hill District was developed during the first waves of real-estate speculation and boom that came with the extension of Southern Pacific Railroad to Los Angeles in 1876, and the construction of the Santa Fe Railroad, completed in 1886; and came to an abrupt recession with the bursting of the bubble in 1888.

Large mansions of the wealthy, designed in the flamboyant styles that were the fashion of the time, were constructed on Bunker Hill, giving way in the 90's to homes for the professional class, and finally, after 1900, to residential hotels and apartment buildings. The mansions have disappeared and the few examples of the eclectic residential architecture remaining at this writing are of modest proportions. They are doomed for demolition with the redevelopment of the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Prior to the 1860's, Bunker Hill was a barren hump which rose to the south of the tiny country town of Los Angeles. As it was difficult to get over or around it, it would for some time influence the growth of the city to the south along its base. Eventually several cable railways made its crest a choice residential area, and tunnels through it made the area to the west more accessible.

CAL-344
Page 2

To understand the growth of the Bunker Hill residential complex, it is necessary to view it in three distinct phases: First as a very exclusive suburban residential development in the 1880's; A second period, beginning roughly about 1890 as a residential area with a high concentration of professional people; Finally, after the turn of the twentieth century, to note the change as an area of residential hotels and apartment buildings.

Prudent Beaudry, a French-Canadian, was the first to exploit the area. With water piped to the summit, M. Beaudry purchased twenty acres bounded by Second, Fourth, Hill and Charity Streets - the latter being today's Grand Avenue. He paid \$517 for the land, and, after subdividing, cleared some \$30,000.

The first of the homes to rise in the new subdivision were for the most part in the "mansion" class, such as the Crocker home, the Rose home, the Bradbury home and Bronson home. All of these large homes were wood frame and were derivations of the "East Lake", "Queen Anne" and "Shingle" styles - at their most spectacular. In the case of the Crocker Mansion, the eastern side was three stories in height, with porches and a tower on this side to take advantage of the view. The Bronson Mansion has been remembered for having had a sixty foot drawing room. The Bradbury Mansion, often cited as the largest home ever built on the hill, featured well balanced asymmetrical proportions. A tall turret rose in the center, which was flanked by gables and a smaller tower on the corner. At present the only architectural firm known to have worked on this early group is that of Curlett and Eisen, who designed the Rose Mansion.

The second era is typified by the increase of the smaller, but usually fine, residences of professional people. These would vary between the trim little wooden home of Judge Julius Brosseau, to the larger, but definitely not in the mansion category, Donnegan home which contained some twenty rooms, but is not much larger than the coach barns at the rear of the Bradbury Mansion. Both, however, were fine homes.

Even in this era of the smaller homes, a number of the older elite continued to reside on the hill, and some would select sites here in preference to the southwestern part of town and particularly the West Adams District, which during the 1890's was beginning to emerge as the city's finest residential section. One of these was the lumber heiress, Myra Hershey, who built a home at 325 South Grand Avenue.

CAL-344
Page 3

The home had been started by William May Garland, but his farsighted socialite wife convinced that her future lay in the West Adams District, asked her husband to cease construction. Another was the home of Lady Elsynth MacDonald, a Canadian, who installed one of the earliest hydraulic elevators in her home, which is still standing, and still remembered as "Lady MacDonald's House".

The Melrose Hotel is often cited as the first of the residential hotels, and its building date is thought to have been 1887. This same year the St. Angelo, Grand Avenue at Temple, opened its doors as well. Typical of the hotels of that era, they were replete with rococo designs executed in shingles and milled wood. The St. Angelo, with its two gables and corner tower was relatively restrained by comparison with the flamboyant and magnificent Melrose. In the case of the latter, there has been a definite attempt to produce a building which would harmonize in appearance with the various existing mansions in the block, and this has often led to the belief that the hotel was a converted residence. The better part of its facade is nothing but galleries with soft curving lines around the large central tower at the front of the building. It is topped by a round domed roof structure, and is finished off by a cupola and finial on top of this. A smaller egg-shaped dome rises over the doorway portion. Behind these appear a profusion of gables, dormer windows and skylights. In all, the effect was magnificent, and still considered so when it was demolished to make way for the new County Courts building.

A number of apartment units built after the turn-of-the-century were mission in styling - or derivations of this popular southland design of that day. In particular, the Elms on Olive Avenue, or the Mission Apartments, both featuring plastered surfaces, tiled roofs and arched porches. The still remaining Dome Apartments, while mission in general feeling, has a striking corner tower which is topped by a form of onion type dome. However, even this feature is capped with tiles.

Demolition of these buildings began as early as 1917 when the Crocker Mansion fell to become the site of an Elks Temple. During the twenties and thirties, the last of the mansion group disappeared and the Fort Moore Hill section disappeared about 1950. During the next decade, the work of redevelopment pushed further and further southward, until there now remains some two or three blocks of thinned out homes, almost all of which are marked for demolition by the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles for the BUNKER HILL URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT.

CAL-344
Page 4

REFERENCES

- A Survey of 19th Century Building in Los Angeles - John Leonard Connolly, Jr. (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Southern California Library)
California's Architectural Frontier - Harold Kinker, San Marino: Huntington Library, 1962
Sixty Years in Southern California - Harris Newmark, New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1916
Los Angeles from the Days of the Pueblo - W. W. Robinson, California Historical Society, 1959.
Los Angeles Herald-Express, May 14, 1938
Los Angeles Examiner, August 22, 1954

Prepared by,

J. Thomas Owen
J. Thomas Owen, History Section
Los Angeles Central Library

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION (TYPICAL)

The following is a general discussion covering houses typical of those built in the second Bunker Hill period (described above under Historical Information) in the late nineteenth century by largely professional people, such as doctors, lawyers, judges and shop owners who wished to be near their down town offices.

They all have common architectural characteristics, differing notably in their individual arrangement of design elements on the front facades such as - cupolas, towers, porch tracery, bay windows, decorative tympana, etc. - and these were mostly adapted directly from plan copy books by builders. An important source of design inspiration of this period was such a book, viz. "Picturesque California Homes" by the brothers Samuel and Joseph Newsom, architects practicing in San Francisco and who later also practiced in Los Angeles; they are first listed in City and County Directory of the Times-Mirror Company, 1886-7.

EXTERIOR

Wall Construction: Wood frame, 2 x _ rough studding, finished with clapboards and/or with ornamental shingle patterns. The structure typically sat on brick foundations, which in some cases became quite high on the rear because of the sloping hillsides.

Porches: Sometimes the most singular feature on the front elevation. These might be ornamented with "jig-saw" or "Carpenter Gothic" detailing in wood or with lathe turned spindles or milled sticking, which were used in ornamental railing balusters, newel posts, or decorative overhead tracery in semi-circles or horseshoe arches, etc. Some porches were accented with a portico over the entrance stair with a tympanum ornamented with relief scrolls, shingle patterns of embossed carving, etc. Many of the porch tracery designs gave a very light and lacy effect to the final result, always in wood. Secondary porches might be included on the upper story over the porch entrance. However, often only decorative railing appeared as a non-functional element in the design. Many of the remaining houses also have rear screened service porches.

Chimneys: Typically made of brick, either rising through the pitched roof from the interior or, when on the exterior wall, might have decorative brick corbels and inset patterns.

Doorways and Doors: Finish wood frames, stock wood casings and moulds; the entrance doors from the main porches were wood paneled with stock stiles and rails but with the upper half containing a panel of decorative glazing often colored "cathedral" type units set in leaded muntins, in varying patterns, usually geometrical with some flamboyant motifs. The main porch entrance was often a pair of doors.

Windows: Softwood, double hung, sash was typical, often ornamented on the front elevation with colored glass units in a fixed transom over the main living room window; sometimes they were flanked with wood pilasters of neo-classic motif or embellished with ornamented wood panels, above or below, in a geometric pattern or embossed elements as varying rosette forms. Bay windows were common - polygonal or rectangular sided - found

CAL-344
Page 6

on the front or side elevations topped with either a simple pitched roof or sometimes a decorative wood balustrade. Dormer windows were typically seen on the main roofs arranged both assymmetrically in the more restrained neo-classic buildings.

Roof: Several types were employed including hip ridges, gables, or combinations of both; usually shingled originally, later covered with rolled composition sheets or asphalt shingles. Tower roofs were of varying forms including modified "Bavarian Baroque", "French Empire Mansard", "Oriental Onion Dome" with redwood shingles, topped with a decorative spire on the turrets with pointed towers.

Cornice: Ornamental band-sawed forms were commonly used on eave facias or verge boards of the gables with over-hanging shingles and perhaps neo-classic corbels at spaced intervals, all in wood.

Miscellaneous: Tympana were nearly always embellished in relief designs using a variety of motifs, popular designs being the rising sunburst effect and floral recoco elements. These patterns were usually from stock moulds, cast in plaster, and readily available to the builder and hence widely used on Victorian homes.

Basements: These were typically employed, usually only a partial excavation at the lower end of the sloping hillside lot with brick walls. Some were interior finished for a general use; most often were not and used for storage.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan: Generally the houses were of two stories, arranged on a longitudinal axis, the lateral elevation facing the street and rear yards. Each floor was usually divided by a central hall entered at the first floor from an entry stair hall leading from the front porch. The stairways were ornamented with milled balustrades, carved newel posts, and again, to a lesser degree, wooden overhead tracery in the finer homes.

CAL-344
Page 7

The first floor rooms usually included a living room to one side of the stair hall and often the dining room on the opposite side, beyond which was the kitchen and pantry, with a screened porch opening to a rear yard. This first floor was nearly always some distance off the ground and reached by front wooden steps leading to an open porch which varied in size from a modest one in the central portion of the facade to a rambling veranda wrapping around the house on one or both sides.

The second floor comprised the bedrooms and bath or baths. These rooms again usually flanked the stair hall or landing. Some homes had a turret room on a half landing above or attic rooms for sleeping or storage.

At the time of this report, most of the remaining houses (which might vary from 12 rooms on the average to 20 rooms for the larger ones) had been converted to rooming houses and/or apartments with cooking facilities.

Flooring: Usually 1" T&G hardwood on sheathing over 2 x _ rough joists: supported by wood girders and spaced foundation piers, for the first floor; minor rooms had softwood planks or sheathing finished with linoleum and ceramic tile in baths.

Walls: Normally of 2 x 4 rough studding at 16" c.c. with wood lath and plaster finish covered with paper. Hallways, stairways and perhaps living and dining rooms would have wood paneled wainscots.

Ceilings: Typically of wood lath and plaster finish, coved corners or staff mould cornices; some of the important rooms might have decorative plaster mould relief work.

Doorways and Doors: Finish softwood frames, applied stops, casings and moulds. Doors usually were made of stock pine stiles and rails with inset panels finished with milled wood mould surrounds.

Trim: Generally softwood for cornice moulds, window casings, cornice moulds, etc. Bases were hardwood.

CAL-344
Page 8

SITE

Elevated terrain overlooking the early plaza and business district of Los Angeles. Later penetrated by tunnels and made readily accessible by cable car tramways.

Submitted by,

William Woollett

William Woollett, AIA
AIA Preservation Committee

Prepared by,

Raymond Girvigian

Raymond Girvigian, AIA
Preservation Officer
Southern California Chapter, AIA

September 1963

APPROVED:

Charles S. Pope

Charles S. Pope, AIA
Supervising Architect, Historic Structures
Western Office, Design and Construction
National Park Service

DATE: *March 1964*